

GRAUSTARK

...By...
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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derstood that Prince Lorenz would descend to meet Mr. Lorry at 8 o'clock on the next morning in the valley beyond the castle, two miles from town. There was no law prohibiting duels in Graustark.

"Well, you're in for it, old man," said Anguish gloomily, his chin in his hands as he fastened melancholy eyes upon his friend.

"Don't worry about me, Harry. There's only one way for this thing to end. His royal highness is doomed."

Lorry spoke with the earnestness and conviction of one who is permitted to see into the future.

Calmly he prepared to write some letters, not to say farewell, but to explain to certain persons the cause of the duel and to say that he gloried in the good fortune which had presented itself. One of these letters was addressed to his mother, another to the father of Prince Lorenz and the last to the Princess of Graustark. To the latter he wrote much that did not appear in the epistles directed to the others. Anguish had been in his room more than an hour and had frequently called to his friend and begged him to secure what rest he could in order that their nerves might be steady in the morning. But it was not until after midnight that the duelist sealed the envelopes, directed them and knocked at his second's door to say:

"I shall intrust these letters to you, Harry. You must see that they start on their way tomorrow."

Then he went to bed and to sleep.

At 6 o'clock his second, who had slept but little, called him. They dressed hurriedly and prepared for the ride to the valley. Their own new English bulldog revolvers were to serve as weapons in the coming combat, and a carriage was to be in waiting for them in a side street at 7 o'clock.

Before leaving their room they heard evidences of commotion in the hotel and were apprehensive lest the inmates had learned of the duel and were making ready to follow the fugitives to the appointed spot. There was a confusion of voices, the sound of a running foot, the banging of doors, the noise increasing as the fugitives stepped into the open hall. Two men amazed to see half-dressed, they were women standing or running about the halls, intense excitement about the and in their action. In their faces policemen were seen. White uniforms fresh from their beds, came dashing upon the scene. There were excited cries, angry shouts and, more mystifying than all, horrified looks and whispers.

"What has happened?" asked Lorry, stopping near the door.

"It can't be a fire. Look! The door to that room down there seems to be the center of attraction. Hold on! Don't go over there, Lorry. There may be something to unnerve you, and that must not happen now. Let us go down this stairway. It leads to a side entrance, I think." They were half-way down the stairs when the thunder of rushing feet in the hall above came to their ears, causing them to hesitate between curiosity and good judgment. "They are coming this way."

"Hear them how! What the devil can be the cause of all this rumppus?" cried the other.

At that instant a half dozen police guards appeared at the head of the stairs. Upon seeing the Americans they stopped and turned as if to oppose a foe approaching from the opposite direction. Baron Dangloss separated himself from the white coats above and called to the men below. In alarm they started for the street door. He was with them in an instant, his usually red face changing from white to purple, his anxious eyes darting first toward the group above and then toward the bewildered Americans.

"What's the matter?" demanded Lorry.

"There! See!" cried Dangloss, and even as he spoke a conflict began at the head of the stairs, the police, augmented by a few soldiers, struggling against a howling, enraged mass of Applandians. Dangloss dragged his reluctant charges through a small door, and they found themselves in the baggage room of the hotel. Despite their queries he offered no explanation, but rushed them along, passing out of the opposite door, down a short stairway and into a side street. A half dozen police guards were awaiting them, and before they could catch the faintest idea of what it all meant they were running with the officers through an alley as if pursued by demons.

"Now, what in thunder does this mean?" panted Lorry, attempting to slacken the pace. He and Anguish were just beginning to regain their senses.

"Do not stop! Do not stop!" wheezed Dangloss. "You must get to a place of safety. We cannot prevent something dreadful happening if you are caught!" "If we are caught?" cried Anguish. "Why, what have we done?"

"Unhand me, Baron Dangloss. This is an outrage!" cried Lorry.

"You haven't a chance, be calm! We are surrounded here. When we reach the street, where you will be safe, I shall explain. I respect the panting chief of

police. A few moments later they were inside the prison gates, angry, impatient, fatigued.

"Is this a plan to prevent the duel?" demanded Lorry, turning upon the chief, who had dropped limply into a chair and was mopping his brow. When he could find his breath enough to answer, Dangloss did so, and he might as well have thrown a bombshell at their feet.

"There'll be no duel. Prince Lorenz is dead!"

"Dead!" gasped the others. "Found dead in his bed, stabbed to the heart!" exclaimed the chief. "We have saved you from his friends, gentlemen, but I must say that you are still in a tight place."

He then related to them the whole story. Just before 6 o'clock Mirox had gone to the prince's room to prepare him for the duel. The door was closed, but unlocked, as he found after repeated knockings. Lorenz was lying on the bed, undressed and covered with blood. The horrified duke made a hasty examination and found that he was dead. A dagger had been driven to his heart as he slept. The hotel was aroused, the police were called, and the excited scene was at its highest pitch when the two friends came from their room a few minutes after 6.

"But what have we to do with this dreadful affair? Why are we with this off here like criminals?" asked Lorry, a feeling of cruel gladness growing out of the knowledge that Lorenz was dead and that the prince's death was freed from his compact.

"My friend," said Dangloss slowly, "you are accused of the murder."

Lorry was too much stunned to be angry, too weak to protest. For some moments after the blow fell he and Anguish were speechless. Then came three constabularies, the rage and the confusion, through all of which Dangloss calmly, finally he sought to quiet them, partially succeeding.

"Mr. Lorry, the evidence is very strong against you, but you shall not be unjustly treated. You are not a prisoner as yet. In Graustark a man who is accused of murder and who was

not by any means a murderer, cannot be legally arrested until he shall go before the prince and take with him his life. I am holding you here, sir, because it is the only place in which you are safe. Lorenz's friends would have torn you to pieces had we not found you first. You are not prisoners, and you may depart if you think it wise."

"But how can they accuse me? I know nothing of the murder until I reached this place," cried Lorry, stopping short in his restless walk before the little baron.

"So you say, but—"

"If you accuse me, I'll kill you!" whispered Lorry, holding himself tense. Anguish caught and held him.

"Be calm, sir," cautioned Dangloss. "I may have my views, but I am not willing to take oath before her royal highness. Listen: You were heard to say you would kill him. You began the fight. You were the aggressor, and there is no one else on earth, it is said, who could have wished to murder him. The man who did the stabbing entered the room through the hall door and left by the same. There are drops of blood in the carpet, leading direct to your door. On your knob are the prints of bloody fingers where you—or some one else—placed his hand in opening the door. It was this discovery, made by me and my men, that fully convinced the enraged friends of the dead prince that you were guilty. When we opened the door, you were gone. Then came the search, the fight at the head of the stairs and the race to the prison. The reason I saved you from that mob should be plain to you. I love my princess, and I do not forget that you risked your life, each of you, to protect her. I have done all that I can, gentlemen, to protect you in return. It means death to you if you fall into the hands of his followers just now. A few hours will cool them off no doubt, but now—it would be madness to face them. I know not what they have done to my men at the hotel—perhaps butchered them."

There was anxiety in Dangloss's voice, and there was honesty in his keen old eyes. His charges now saw his situation clearly and apologized variously for the words they had uttered under the pressure of somewhat extenuating circumstances. They expressed a willingness to remain in the prison until the excitement abated or until some one swore his life against the supposed murderer. They were virtually prisoners, and they knew it well. Furthermore, they could see that Baron Dangloss believed Lorry guilty of the murder. Protestations of innocence had been politely received and politely disregarded.

"Do you expect one of his friends to take the oath?" asked Lorry.

"Yes; it is sure to come."

"But you will not do so yourself?"

"No."

"I thank you, captain, for I see that

you believe me guilty."

"I do not say you are guilty, remember, but I will say that if you did murder Prince Lorenz you have made the people of Graustark rejoice from the bottoms of their hearts, and you will be eulogized from one end of the land to the other."

"Hanged and eulogized," said Lorry grimly.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE TOWER.

THE two captives who were not prisoners were so dazed by the unexpected events of the morning that they did not realize the vast seriousness of the situation for hours. Then it dawned upon them that appearances were really against them and that they were alone in a land far beyond the reach of help from home. One circumstance puzzled them with its damming mystery: How came the blood stains upon the doorknob? Dangloss courteously discussed this strange and unfortunate feature with them, but with ill concealed skepticism. It was evident that his mind was clear in regard to the whole affair.

Anguish was of the opinion that the real murderer and stabber the knob intentionally, aiming to cast suspicion on the man who had been challenged. The assassin had an object in leaving those convicting finger marks where they would do the most damage. He either desired the arrest and death of the American or hoped that his own guilt might escape attention through the misleading evidence. Lorry held, from his deductions, that the crime had been committed by a fanatic who loved his sovereign too devotedly to see her wedded to Lorenz. Then why should he wantonly cast guilt upon the man who had been her protector, objected Dangloss.

The police guards came in from the hotel about 10 o'clock, bearing marks of an ugly conflict with the Applandians. They reported that the avengers had been quelled for the time being, but that a delegation had already started for the castle to lay the matter before the princess. Officers had searched the rooms of the Americans for blood stains, but had found no sign of them.

"Did you find bloody water in which hands had been washed?" asked Anguish.

"No," responded one of the guards. "There was nothing to be found in the beds and mats except soapy water. There is not a blood stain in the room, captain."

"That shakes your theory a little," cried Anguish triumphantly. "Examine Mr. Lorry's hands and see if there is blood upon them." Lorry's hands were white and uncontaminated. Dangloss were a pucker on his brow.

Shortly afterward a crowd of Applandians came to the prison gates and demanded the person of Graustark's prince, declaring after an angry show of force, that the princess's edicts should be obeyed, watching the walls and windows.

"This may cost Edelmox a great deal of trouble, gentlemen, but there is no danger here. I have this to say: The city is known in months. Everybody believes you killed him, Mr. Lorry, but if you all love you for the deed," said Dangloss, returning at noon from a visit to the hotel and a ride through the streets. "The prince's friends have been at the castle since 10 o'clock, and I am of the opinion that they are having a hard time with the high priestess."

"That's a mess!" cried Lorry. "The town is crazy with excitement. Messengers have been sent to old Prince Bolanz to inform him of the murder and to urge him to hasten hither, where he may fully enjoy the vengeance that is to be worked upon his son's slayer. I have not seen a wilder time in Edelmox since the close of the siege, fifteen years ago. By my soul, you are in a bad box, sir. They are lurking in every part of town to kill you if you attempt to leave the tower before the princess signs an order to restrain you legally. Your life outside these walls would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

Captain Quinox of the princess' body guard, accompanied by a half dozen of his men, made up to the prison gates about 2 o'clock and was promptly admitted. The young captain was in sore distress.

"The Duke of Mirox has sworn that you are the murderer, Mr. Lorry, and stakes his life," said he after greetings. "Her highness has just placed in my hands an order for your arrest as the assassin of Prince Lorenz."

Lorry turned as pale as death. "You—you don't mean to say that she has signed a warrant—that she believes me guilty?" he cried, again.

"She has signed the warrant, but very much against her inclination. Count Halford informed me that she pleaded and argued with the duke for hours, seeking to avert the act which is bound to give pain to all of us. He was obdurate and threatened to carry complaint to Bolanz, who would instantly demand satisfaction. As the duke is willing to die if you are proved innocent, there was no other course left for her than to dictate and sign this royal decree. Captain Dangloss, I am instructed to give you these papers. One is the warrant for Mr. Lorry's arrest, the other orders you to assume charge of him and to place him in confinement until the day of trial."

While Quinox was making this statement the accused stood with bowed head and throbbing heart. He did not see the captain's hand triable as he passed the documents to Dangloss, nor did he hear the unhappy sigh that came from the latter's lips. Anguish, fiery and impulsive, was not to be subdued.

"Is there no warrant for my arrest?" he demanded.

"There is not. You are at liberty to

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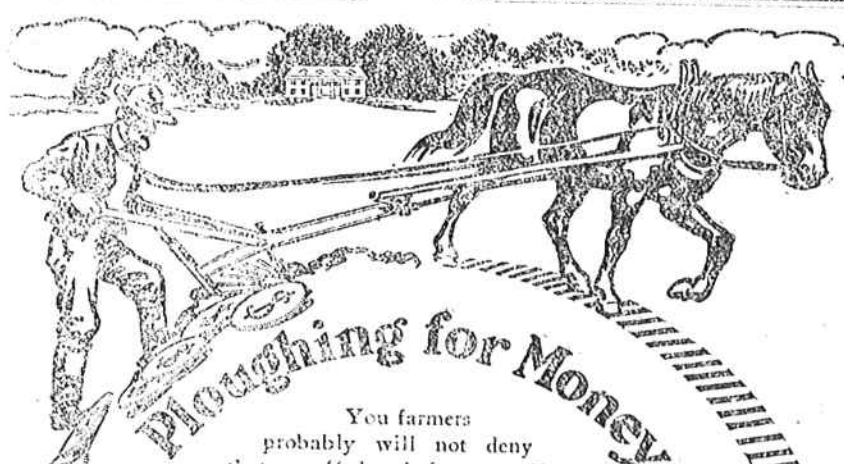
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